

Formal Counseling (AFI 36-704, Discipline and Adverse Actions)

Air Force Instruction (AFI) 36-704, Discipline and Adverse Actions, defines counseling as a non-disciplinary method to provide information, instruction, guidance, advice, assistance, or encouragement. It is an effective communications technique which, when properly used, ensures your employees understand your expectations and requirements of them and improves work performance and conduct. Counseling should be conducted when supervisors first detect performance or conduct deficiency, rather than at the point in time that supervisors feel the performance or conduct deficiency is out of control. Counseling should be conducted as frequently as the need requires and be open to an exchange of ideas between the participants. Counseling used in this manner may be seen by employees as constructive rather than punitive.

You may wish to refer to the meeting as a discussion rather than a “counseling” in order to avoid the employee’s initial defensiveness and to increase receptiveness to your constructive observations. The following suggestions can help the “discussion” be effective:

- a. Be timely. The discussions must occur as quickly as possible after you become aware of a deficiency or sense a problem. Do not wait until you find the situation to be totally unacceptable. Early intervention reinforces your standards rather than personalizes the criticism - the reason is constructive not punitive.
- b. Be prepared. Be knowledgeable of the area(s) you intend to discuss. You may wish to outline your objectives prior to the meeting.
- c. Be direct and honest. Deal with specifics. If you can’t address a problem, it’s possible the problem doesn’t exist. Without a clear understanding of the problem and the corrective actions, the employee will not be able, although willing, to meet your expectations.
- d. Avoid hidden agendas. Don’t leave the employee guessing what was said, what was meant, or what is expected.
- e. Be consistent with your expectations. These should be fair, equitable and equally applied to all your employees. Treat each employee as an adult. Most importantly, counsel as you would want to be counseled.

f. Conduct counseling in private surroundings and keep it confidential.

g. Provide an atmosphere, which encourages discussion. Try to arrive at an understanding of your concern and joint solution for the problem.

h. Be sensitive to the needs of the employee and alert to any underlying factors which may be influencing the deficiency, mood swings, or conduct. Be willing to listen to what the employee has to say on his or her own behalf.

i. Maintain your focus.

j. Document the discussion, as appropriate. Part B of the AF Form 971, Supervisor's Record of Employee, provides an area for your comments and record of events to include counseling's. It is recommended that counseling be documented on plain bond paper and attached to the brief with a cross reference in pencil on Part B referring to the attachment. This will simplify removal at a later date.